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ABSTRACT

English department heads often find themselves walking a tightrope, trying to keep the various elements of their departments in balance. Yet despite the diversity of interests, English departments should maintain a united house. In fact, separating disciplines--such as writing and literature--into different departments would be negative for both parties, since from a practical and political perspective both sides would lose the clout essential in the fight over the institutional budget. All members of the English department should remember what unites them as a discipline--the written word, whether as finished product or as process. Different perspectives on this common subject are complementary, not antithetical. A reconciliation needs to occur between the literature and writing faculty in order to ease existing tensions. Faculty from each area should be promoted and tenured. In addition, a dialogue between faculty members can be fostered by insuring that committee memberships reflect all departmental constituencies. This type of shared responsibility requires dialogue, eventual understanding, and finally, mutual respect. As the emphasis on the importance of writing in the curriculum continues to grow, the faculty with expertise in writing and rhetoric will gain the respect of other faculty members. Everyone can share in the benefits generated by the strength of the writing program. (MM)

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A House Undivided: Some Perspectives from a Once "Intimate Enemy," Now a Department Head

FRED L. MILNE

I was both distressed and surprised when I read in the ADE Bulletin the text of Maxine Hairston's 1985 keynote address to the CCCC convention in Minneapolis in which she called upon rhetoricians and writing teachers to break the psychological bonds with the literary critics who dominate the profession of English Studies and to become autonomous professionals with a discipline of their own--even, if necessary, to separate physically into academic departments of their own. In discussing the problems which moved her to call for this breaking of bonds, Hairston likens the struggle to gain recognition for writing as a legitimate academic pursuit within today's English departments to invading China. No matter how hard the fight, "the mandarins are untouched." To be called a mandarin came as a surprise to me, because I've never thought of myself as a mandarin, though I suppose I do qualify from Hairston's point of view. My training is as a literature specialist--nineteenth century British romanticism, sub-specialty: Shelley--ergo species: mandarin. I was distressed, however, to find myself also termed "the intimate enemy." Now here I had to protest, for I have never been an enemy--intimate or otherwise--of writing. I was assuaged somewhat when Hairston referred to "sympathetic chairs" who "are often more practical than their faculty." Now that's more like me, I thought, but something still rankled about being called a "sympathetic" chair. That sounds like someone who feels sorry for

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writing faculty and decides to tolerate them out of some mixed motives of pity and practicality, which would still qualify as one of "the intimate enemy." If I am one of the mandarins, I would prefer to think of myself as one who actively recognizes, supports, and encourages the legitimacy and contributions of writing specialists as entirely appropriate, and yes, necessary within the established boundaries of the traditional English Department and the discipline of English studies. That has been the major thrust of my tenure as Department Head at the University of Cincinnati. In fact, I would guess that a few of my fellow departmental mandarins would say I am their "intimate enemy." Some are distressed by the level of support given to the writing program and to its tremendous growth in the last four years. So be it. My answer is that our department and our discipline have been both enriched and revitalized by this growth.

My observation's today come after five years as Head of the English Department at the University of Cincinnati, a large state institution enrolling some 34,000 students on its central and its three branch campuses. The Department offers the Ph.D. and M.A. degrees, has 270 undergraduate majors, and is responsible for a three-quarter Freshman English sequence required of all freshman enrolled in the University's eleven baccalaureate colleges. Currently, we have fifty-three full-time faculty, thirty-eight part-time faculty, and twenty-four graduate teaching assistants

for a total teaching staff of 116. We are by far the largest of the 21 departments that make-up the College of Arts and Sciences. In terms of full-time faculty, we are almost as large as the entire College of Business Administration and twice the size of the College of Law. In addition to faculty whose expertise is in the expected areas of British and American literature, our Department has for many years been home for linguistics, journalism, creative writing, and composition and rhetoric. We are a diverse, sometimes obstreperous house with competing and sometimes conflicting needs, interests, and demands--just ask our Dean. As Department Head, I often find myself walking a tightrope, trying to keep the various elements in balance, sometimes tilting one way, sometimes another. Yet, we are finally, despite our diversity, a united house, no more so than when we are threatened from without. I believe it would be a disastrous error, not only for our Department at the University of Cincinnati, but for the profession as a whole if we defined ourselves in such a way that literature and writing were seen as so separate and distinct that they needed to be viewed as separate disciplines, demanding separate homes within the academy. The consequences of such a separation would, I think, would be negative for both parties. From a very practical and political perspective, both sides would lose the clout that can be essential in the political arena where the battle over the institutional budget takes place.

Any administration that encourages the splitting up of English Departments into separate departments of literature and writing should be regarded warily. Even within the traditional configuration for humanities departments, in the competition for budget resources, we tend to be the poor relation in comparison to the hard sciences. Why is that? Well, our equipment needs are demonstrably less costly than those essential to the instructional and research needs of the sciences. But consistently the humanities are underfunded across the board in comparison to the sciences. Faculty salaries are lower--market pressures, you know. There are fewer dollars available per faculty member for professional travel to conference like this one than are available to the sciences. Stipends for TA's are lower in the humanities. There are fewer support staff in the humanities. Why? Because from an administrative perspective, the humanities do not generate the big grant bucks from government and industry that are the hallmark of the sciences. The humanities tend not to produce Nobel prize winners. In short, we tend not to contribute to the institutional budget, we don't generate overhead money. Yet administrations acknowledge--sometimes grudgingly--that we are necessary. We are necessary to provide the instructional staff for so-called service courses--courses required by core curriculum or distribution requirements. We are expected to engage in research, to publish in order to receive tenure or to be promoted, but in many instances we are simultaneously expected to carry higher teaching loads than our colleagues in the sciences. When

I became Department Head in 1983, I discovered that the teaching load for the English Department was the second highest in the College, exceeded only by history and nearly three times that of chemistry. Because we had more students to serve, we were even teaching more than our colleagues in philosophy and classics. We have, by the way, taken steps over the objections of a former Dean to remedy that situation. We were able to do so by insisting that our mission involves co-equally essential activities--teaching and research. In order to sustain a quality graduate program, our faculty must be engaged in research and they must have the time to do it. Our time in the library must be seen by administrators as being as necessary as the scientist's time in the laboratory.

Perhaps a more disturbing indication that our contribution is not sufficiently valued by administrators is the fact that many humanities departments, and English departments in particular, are forced to rely on poorly paid part-time instructors to teach those service courses. As large as we are in terms of full-time faculty, we must still, as I mentioned earlier, rely on some 38 part-time faculty to staff all the sections of Freshman English we must offer every year. This is not because the full-time faculty refuses to participate in the teaching of composition. Everyone carries some of the freshman teaching load. All full-time faculty, the Department Head included, participates in grading the Exit Exam required of all freshman before they can receive final credit for their freshman sequence. But we have other teaching

demands as well--other services courses to staff, courses for our majors, writing courses at all levels with high student demand, and of course graduate courses, both in writing and literature. During the Winter Quarter all of our courses combined, from Freshman English to graduate seminars, were at 97% of enrollment capacity. Given these across the board enrollment demands, we must rely on part-time faculty because we have too few full-time faculty to do the job confronting us. Yet can you imagine a science department routinely complementing its full-time faculty with part-time instructors paid as poorly as they are in English Departments? Of course not; it would be unthinkable.

If we were to divide into separate departments--an idea that has been circulated by the Provost's office at Cincinnati--both departments would be at a disadvantage, I fear. At first glance such a move might seem attractive to literature faculty, particularly those who would be glad to be rid of the freshman composition course. Those of us trained to be literature specialists could devote our teaching efforts exclusively to literature. But would we be better off in other respects? I doubt it. I think we would see literature departments fall further behind in the scramble for resources--there would be that other new department that needs money too. We would have greater

difficulty holding on to faculty lines vacated by retirements, resignations, etc. After all, the FTE count would be

significantly lower, and enrollment limits in literature courses can be adjusted upward more readily than in writing courses, thereby requiring fewer faculty. On the other hand, a newly created writing department, under whatever name, would have to begin with a relatively small full-time faculty and a high student demand for courses that must necessarily be carefully limited in terms of size. Its reason for being, from an administrative point of view would be primarily, if not exclusively, service teaching. Given that perspective, I would foresee pressures for a higher teaching load at the expense of research. Because enrollment demands would outstrip full-time faculty resources, one sees the prospect of the number of part-time staff actually outnumbering the full-time. I doubt that significant increases in the hiring of full-time faculty would be forthcoming. In short, I think the division of our house would be dangerous in practical, political terms for both parties.

So why the call for division or secession, specially from within our own discipline? The issue, as Maxine Hairston made clear, is really respect. Whether we view ourselves from the perspective of literary studies or from the perspective of composition and rhetoric, our subject matter broadly defined is the same: the written word, whether as finished product or as process. That is what unites as a discipline, and we cannot afford to lose sight of that fact. We need to remember that our different perspectives on our common subject matter are

complementary, not antithetical. The literary mandarins need to be reminded that the emergence of rhetoric in the English Department is not a new phenomenon. We are not dealing with a "Johnny come lately" discipline that needs to defend its claim to legitimacy. Quite the contrary. What we have seen is the last fifteen or twenty years is the re-emergence of a discipline which represents a return to the traditional center of gravity in the English Department--a fact that most literature specialists are unaware of or refuse to acknowledge. In his 1985 College English essay, "Rhetoric and Poetics in the English Department: Our Nineteenth Century Inheritance," James Berlin traces the course of development of English Departments in American colleges. He demonstrates that "the main impetus for initially setting up a separate department for English studies was to provide college graduates who could prosper in professions that demanded the ability to write." Thus, initially rhetoric was the central mission of English departments. As classical literature was supplanted by literature in English, literature courses developed in the English Department and soon what Berlin calls "the radical separation of rhetoric and poetics was institutionalized." Berlin succinctly summarizes why that separation came about:

> "While literature courses were thus operating within the context of current poetic theories, the rhetoric course--now identified with freshman composition--becomes petrified in the service of eighteenth-century positivists epistemology. Rhetoric is cut off from its classical roots in its

> commitment to the new scientific disciplines and severed from poetics because it no longer shares with it a common epistemology. Given these parallel developments, the literary text assumes privileged status, carrying with it the prestige of the liberal arts tradition as well as the attractions of a vital and current set of ideas. Rhetorical texts are relegated to a minor status, concerned only with that which lends itself to the inductive methods."

That situation dominated the intellectual organization of most English departments throughout the first half of the twentieth century. I am a product of that climate, that's why I'm one of the mandarins in Hairston view. Yet, writing in the same year that Hairston proposed breaking the bonds that would finalize the "radical separation," Berlin sees signs of reconciliation growing out of developments in literary criticism: He writes:

> "The significant feature of the development in literary criticism is that a revitalized poetics conscious of its relation to rhetoric is emerging at the same time that rhetoric is again being taken seriously. The possibility that rhetoric and poetics will once again realize their dependence on one another, together addressing the total range of uses to which language is put, is imminent."

It would be a shame at this very moment of reconciliation to arrest the process through secession. At Cincinnati, all of the

tensions between literature and writing faculty described by Hairston in her address exist to one degree or another, but I think we are beginning to recognize not only the possibility, but also the necessity of standing together as a unified discipline. Perhaps, Jim Berlin would disagree with this assessment because he left Cincinnati last year for Purdue, but from my perspective of fifteen years at Cincinnati and now five years as Head, I believe we have made great strides. Once upon a time, the tension was between British and American literature. That was resolved with without secession. Since then linguists, the journalists, the creative writers have all emerged in our Department to be initially regarded with some degree of suspicion, but all have achieved legitimacy and have been integrated. We have learned to promote and tenure faculty in each area. We have taken care to draft RPT guidelines that accommodate the different scholarly/ creative achievements appropriate to each group. Where we collectively find ourselves unqualified to evaluate the work done in a given area, we seek, with the candidate's help, appropriate experts to guide us. In other words, while the so-called mandarins still comprise the majority of our faculty, we have been sensitive not to load the dice in our favor in regard to RPT considerations. That is one example of how respect is achieved.

Another is through dialogue. We encourage such dialogue by insuring that committee memberships reflected all departmental constituencies. Our Freshman English program was designed by the entire faculty, thus insuring that everyone buys into it; we all

have a stake in it and feel responsible for it. With the guidance of the Freshman Program Director, all full-time faculty, regardless of their principal area of expertise, teach FE, all grade the Exit Exam. Thus, the teaching of writing, at least at the freshman level, is a responsibility we all share together. And shared responsibility requires dialogue, eventual understanding and finally mutual respect.

As the emphasis on the importance of writing in the curriculum continues to mount, we will learn to respect and value those of our faculty who are experts in rhetoric and writing. That is already happening at Cincinnati. Most of our hiring at the full-time ranks the last five years has been in the writing areas. We have seen the emergence of professional writing, and the student demand for courses in this area appears to be insatiable. And a recognition of both legitimacy and respect is the fact that our faculty has been firm that the student demand can only be met by full-time faculty appointments. We will no longer condone the teaching of writing through part-time appointments. With the strong support of a new Dean--from chemistry--the first real
efforts are being made to deal with the problem of part-time faculty in our freshman program.

If you ask me where the exciting developments in our Department are taking place today, I will tell you unequivocally

in the writing areas. Our writing faculty have developed as a real community, collaborating on projects and displaying amazing energy and success in landing grants. The professional writing and journalism programs now have a networked computer lab. Another designated for Freshman English will probably open in the autumn, thanks to the generous support of the Apple Corporation. In 1985, we received a $1.4 million grant from the State to fund new permanent full-time faculty lines--all designated for writing areas. Today, our writing program is one of six finalists--and the only one from the College of Arts and Sciences--for yet another State grant that would fund creation of a state of the art publishing laboratory. In short, writing is at the center of activity today at Cincinnati, from the freshman to the graduate levels.

There are some who remain skeptical of the advantages of these developments, but I am convinced that such skepticism in most cases reflects insecurity, an unacknowledged sense in some that the discipline is growing away from them, leaving them behind, futilely attempting to believe that the English Departments they entered in the 50's and 60's represent the ideal, a type of fading golden age. Such reactions inevitably accompany dramatic change. What I have tried to do at Cincinnati is insure that everyone shares in the benefits generated by the good fortune of the writing program. Their grants have provided more money for travel, and everyone shares in that. My fondest hope is that the

literature faculty will soon follow the lead of the writing faculty and go do likewise.

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